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Turkey and Bulgaria in the post-Cold War Era: A success story

Introduction

The historical heritage of the past full of mistrust and antagonism and Turkey's and Bulgaria's position at the border line of the international bloc confrontation have always set clear limits for bilateral friendship. During the Cold War years the roles of both states were relatively defined. Bulgaria was the USSR's bulwark in the Balkans and after the mid-1960s the only faithful follower of the Moscow line in the peninsula. Bulgaria's past communist orthodoxy, from Moscow's perspective, coupled with her location on the northern borders of Greece and Turkey, lent it a unique strategic importance. In addition, Bulgaria's proximity to Turkey afforded the USSR a potential stepping-stone to the Turkish Dardanelles and the Bosphorus. During the Cold War period Turkey's role was also vital inside NATO. Because of her position, she helped to deter a Soviet attack on NATO's central front since her forces could threaten Warsaw Pact forces in the Balkans and the Transcaucasus. In addition, Turkey required to control the Istanbul straits, Çanakale and the Sea of Marmara, a vital route for Soviet vessels sailing from their harbors in the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.

The substantial changes in the international system in the end of 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet security and political structures has had its immediate implications on the Balkans in general and Bulgaria in particular which marked a new era, in domestic politics and foreign policies.

Under the new circumstances, Turkey and Bulgaria, Balkan neighbors, began to redefine their relationship. In the beginning of the 1990s Bulgaria along with its effort to create a democratic political system faced a double serious problem. On the one hand, in international level the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO) and the USSR-sponsored

Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA), the two basic pillars of the Bulgarian political, military and economic policy collapsed. On the other hand, in regional level had extremely bad relations with Turkey.

With no great power acting as protector for its security; the economy in crisis after more than forty years of a command economy; and in no good relations with the country which has the second largest military force in NATO, Bulgarian leadership felt that the country's position was vulnerable.

Bulgaria tried immediately to give a response to this double problem. In international level adopted an orientation towards the Euro-Atlantic structures and in regional level sought to normalize its relations with Turkey. Immediate priorities for the Bulgarian government were the abolishment of the repression policy and the restoration of the rights of the Turkish minority.

Turkey for her part, had also new concerns. Due to the demise of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact alliance, she sought to find a new role in the post-Cold War setting. The West-East confrontation did not exist any more and Turkey had the chance to develop normal relations with Bulgaria. Turkey hoped to minimize further immigration from Bulgaria and to ensure that ethnic Turks living in the Bulgarian territory enjoy equal rights.

Turkey and Bulgaria had the same priorities in their foreign policies as both pursued full integration in the European institutions. Turkey was already a member or an associated member of most of the European institutions. However, she could provide necessary aid to Bulgaria. These were the main reasons, which favoured a close cooperation between Turkey and Bulgaria.

The present study summarizes the historical background of the Turkish-Bulgarian relations during the Cold War years. Then, examines the bilateral relations during the 1980s, focusing on the Bulgarian government's assimilation campaign towards the Turkish minority and its impact on the Turkish-Bulgarian relations. The third part of this study is devoted to examine the political and security challenges for Bulgaria and Turkey during the post-Cold War years. It also attempts to analyze the political and military relations between Turkey and Bulgaria in the 1990s.

The Turkish-Bulgarian Relations During the Cold-War Years

Relations between Turkey and Bulgaria remained indifferent until the mid-1950s. They were characterized by periodical and acute confrontations, caused mostly of the 1950-1951 mass emigration of Bulgarian Turks¹. Another factor that influenced the Turkish-Bulgarian relations was the Soviet-Turkish relations, which remained unstable and uncertain. Turkey felt threatened from the Soviet Union both territorially and ideologically. Soviet military and ideological penetration had reached the heart of Berlin, and Soviet influence had also made dangerous inroads into northern Iran. Turkey did not possess adequate quantitative or qualitative military power to deter this newly revived colossal power from threatening her border. In the Cold War atmosphere Turkish-Bulgarian relations had no chance of being more intensive and friendly either. Turkey's concern for her sensitive security position; for the time being unquestioned position in the Western alliance and her deep suspicion of Soviet politics were given a greater priority even than the interest of using closer relations with Bulgaria to improve the Bulgarian Turks situation².

In the beginning of the 1960s, a real and more substantial improvement in relations between the two countries came into being and led to the most intensive period of contacts and cooperation. The reasons for this improvement have to be seen more in global politics and in the framework of Turkish-Soviet relations than in strictly bilateral aspects. It was mainly the development of international détente and more than that, Turkey's revised attitude towards the Soviet Union which paved the way for an improvement in Bulgarian-Turkish relations³. A certain alienation between Turkey and the United States contributed to a more diversified Turkish foreign policy, which led to closer contacts with the Soviet Union. These were the results of the American withdrawal of the missiles from the Turkish territory after the

1. Wolfgang Hopken, "Bulgarian-Turkish relations", in Erol Manisali, ed., *Turkey and the Balkans*, International Girne Conference, 1990, pp. 78-79.

2. With details, Bilal N. Simsir, *The Turks of Bulgaria (1878-1985)*, London 1988, pp. 167-180.

3. Oral Sander, "Turkish-Bulgarian relations", *Foreign Policy. The Quarterly Review of the Foreign Policy Institute*, Ankara, XII/3-4, pp.16-17.

Cuban crisis in 1962 and the American attitude towards the Cyprus question in the mid-1960s. Turkish-Soviet contacts became more intensive after the American military embargo following the Turkish military intervention in Cyprus in 1974. Under these conditions of a Turkish-Soviet rapprochement, the space for maneuver in the Turkish-Bulgarian relations became larger on both sides.

Diplomatic relations was re-established in 1966. There were regular mutual visits at Foreign Minister and Head of State level from 1968 onwards, and more than half a dozen bilateral agreements in the field of economics and trade were signed⁴. The issue of the Turkish minority was considerably improved after the immigration and family unification agreement of 1968, which set up much more favourable conditions for immigration than that of 1950.

In 1975, the “Declaration of Good Neighborly Relations” was signed. However, this pact could not hide the fact that both sides could only agree in general terms of peace and détente. In some acute problems such as Cyprus, opinions completely diverged. Economic relations increased in absolute terms during those nearly fifteen years of relatively good relations, but in relative terms even in this period they never gained any real significance for either country.

The Bulgarian Government's Attitude Towards the Turkish Minority in Bulgaria in the 1980s

The period of quiet relations ended, when Bulgaria started its famous name-changing campaign at the end of 1984, which turned bilateral relations into a very low level. The background reasons which may explain this organized Bulgarian policy were the following. The growth rate of the population in Bulgaria has been consistently decreasing in the 1980s. In 1980 the growth rate was 3.6 per 1000 and in 1984 it was down to 2.4. The growth rates for the Muslim populations —especially the ethnic Turks, the Pomaks, and the Roma— has been far higher than that for the majority of the population⁵. This highlighted a double concern for the Bulgarian authorities. Firstly, the minority population

4. *United Nations Treaty Series*, 759/1970, pp. 223-239.

5. *Bulgaria. Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks*, Amnesty International publications, 1986, p. 24.

was rapidly increasing while the majority was actually declining. Secondly, large areas of the countryside, especially the important agricultural areas in the south around Kardzhali —vital for Bulgaria's valuable tobacco exports— and the Dobrudzha —a major wheat growing region— were becoming increasingly populated by the minorities. The authorities' concern was compounded in the case of the ethnic Turks living in the south near Smolyan and Kardzhali by the proximity of Turkey.

Another factor of the assimilation campaign was religion. The Pomaks, the ethnic Turks (with the exception of the Gagauz, estimated a few thousands, who profess the orthodox Christian faith and live near Varna in the north) and the majority of Roma are Sunni Muslims. Religious attitudes have remained strong among the ethnic Turks, especially peasants, as compared to ethnic Bulgarians —a situation not very pleasant for the authorities. Adherence to the Islamic faith was seen as being a key factor inhibiting loyalty to the communist government.

One more factor was the modernization. The Bulgarian Communist Party claimed to be the possessor of the Marxist-Leninist ideology, which aimed at the rapid implementation of policies to turn Bulgaria into a modern industrial state. The existence of a large minority, living in concentrated areas, speaking a different language (Turkish) and having a traditional way of life was seen as an obstacle to the modernization process⁶. The year 1985 was the last one of the five-year period for replacing all identity cards and a national census was scheduled to be held in December 1985. This also may have been one of the reasons explaining the intensity and the short duration of the campaign to change all the names of the ethnic Turks from Turkish forms to Bulgarian ones.

Thus, the Bulgarian authorities initiated a countrywide campaign to forcibly change the names of all ethnic Turks. On the ground that the roads were blocked due to adverse weather conditions, access to the regions where the ethnic Turks were predominate was not allowed to foreign observers or visitors. These restrictions remained in force for certain areas, notably those around Kardzhah in the south and Yablanov in the eastern Stara Planina until 1989.

Initially there was a period of complete silence on the matter lasting

6. Milena Mahon, "The Turkish minority under Communist Bulgaria-politics of ethnicity and power", *Journal of Southern Europe and the Balkans*, 1/2, 1999, pp. 156-157.

until reports of the campaign began to appear in the news media outside Bulgaria in early 1985. The Bulgarian authorities stated that the ethnic Turks were in fact descendants of the Slav Bulgarians who had been forcibly converted to Islam under Ottoman rule (i.e. that they were Pomaks). The authorities further stated that these "Slav Bulgarians" were all "voluntarily" and "spontaneously" requesting new Bulgarian names as a sign of their "rebirth in the Bulgarian nation"⁷. The authorities have called this name-changing campaign "the reconstruction of Bulgarian names" and have repeatedly denied that there has been any element of force or coercion involved⁸. There were some ethnic Turks who voluntarily requested new names, especially those in the party/state apparatus. However, such cases were rare compared to the majority, where these "voluntary" and "spontaneous" requests were made under severe duress⁹.

The ethnic Turks who refused to accept or to use the new identity cards were arrested and were subjected to the administrative measures of internal banishment for protesting at the assimilation campaign. Under the terms of the "People's Militia law of 1976" article 39(1), amended in 12 August 1983, the authorities could, among other measures, apply without trial the "preventive administrative measure" of compulsory residence in another place of habitation for a period of one to three years "on people who carry out anti-social activities affecting the security of the country"¹⁰. These measures were often used as a supplementary punishment on ethnic Turkish prisoners after their release.

The violation of the human rights of the Turkish minority caused the Turkish reaction and called the Bulgarian government to start negotiations in order to work out a solution to the minority problem. As Bulgaria refused to enter into negotiations, Turkey raised the issue at various international fora including the UN General Assembly, the CSCE and the Council of Europe. In addition, human rights groups like the US Helsinki Watch Committee raised the issue both in the Bulgarian government and in the United Nations Human Rights Commission.

7. Hugh Poulton, *The Balkans Minorities and States in Conflict*, Minority Rights Publications, 1993, p. 130.

8. *The Economist*, December 14, 1985, p. 55.

9. For more details, *Bulgaria Imprisonment of Ethnic Turks*, pp. 8-14.

10. *Bulgaria Imprisonment*, p.15.

Amnesty International twice in June 1986 and in May 1987, submitted its concerns for Bulgaria to the United Nations under the procedure for confidentially reviewing communications about human rights abuses. All these prompted Bulgaria to carry out a belated reappraisal of the unconstructive attitude she had hitherto adopted. Bulgaria consequently reversed her previous position of rejecting Turkish calls for negotiation and agreed to initiate a process of dialogue with Turkey in accordance with the Turkish-Bulgarian Protocol concluded in Belgrade on 23 February 1988. Turkey's principal objective in this process of dialogue was to ensure the restoration of the rights and the status of the minority and to secure recognition of their right to leave Bulgaria for the country of their choice¹¹.

The contacts between the two sides did not bring substantial results as the Bulgarian side maintained the policy of denial of the existence of the Turkish minority¹² the only limited improvement taken place on the issue of family reunification. Bulgaria authorized 143 ethnic Turks to immigrate to Turkey to reunite with their families¹³.

The Turkish minority population tried to resist in the assimilation campaign with sporadic protests which increased in early 1989 with mass participation in various unofficial protest groups. In January 1988 six Bulgarian dissidents set up an Independent Association for the Defense of Human Rights in Bulgaria (IADHR). Despite the severe harassment by the authorities with many founder members forced into internal exile or emigration, the association has continued to function. Another Turkish civil rights group called the Democratic League of the Rights of Man was formed in late 1988. This group opposed the assimilation campaign and the repression of Islam. Furthermore, in January 1989 a third association —The Association for the support of Vienna 1989— (ASV89) was set up in Haskovo region. This organi-

11. *The Tragedy of the Turkish Muslim Minority in Bulgaria-Documents-*, Ankara, Foreign Policy Institute, 1989, p. 8.

12. Between 30 September 1988 until 7 January 1989 the two Foreign Ministers had three meetings, in New York on the occasion of the 43rd Session of the UN General Assembly, in Paris on the occasion of the International Conference on Chemical weapons and then in Vienna during the closing session of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe.

13. *The Tragedy of the Turkish Muslim Minority in Bulgaria*, pp.10-11.

zation's name was due to the attempt to bring to the attention of the world public the plight of ethnic Turks in Bulgaria at the time of the CSCE Conference on Human Rights in Paris in early June 1989¹⁴. These three independent organizations (IADHR, The Democratic League, and ASV89) all had good connections with each other and quickly attracted thousands of members.

In mid-May 1989 mass protest and hunger strikes started. The Bulgarian authorities responded with violent repression and mass expulsion of activists from Bulgaria. All the initial leaders of the three organizations (IADHR, The Democratic League, and ASV89) were expelled by the end of May¹⁵. By late August over 300,000 Turks had left Bulgaria and crossed into Turkey, although between 120,000 to 180,000 subsequently returned¹⁶. Many ethnic Turks had decided that the policy of forced assimilation and the attendant official repression was such that there was no future for them in Bulgaria and they could start a new life in Turkey.

The sheer size of the numbers involved indicated that authorities apparently seemed to be allowing large numbers to emigrate. The decision to open the borders for immigration was influenced by the increasing opposition among the Turkish community after the government's announcement to pass a new passport law in March 1989. This decision was influenced by the attempt to improve Zhivkov's already damaged international image, as a "reformer" and supporter of "perestroyka", which he tried to make public believe since 1987. It is, however, quite possible that Zhivkov, with this decision tried to calm down internal critics within the leadership itself, who already during this time realized the tremendous international damage caused to the country by the anti-Turkish policy. Financially, the outflow of 300,000 people had severe consequences. It meant a loss of approximately 4 per cent of the entire labour force in the agriculture sector, vital for the Bulgarian economy¹⁷.

The campaign of assimilation had naturally delivered a serious blow to the Turkish-Bulgarian relations. Despite that the arrival of such

14. H. Poulton, *The Balkans*, p. 153.

15. *FBIS-WEU*, June 12, 1989, pp. 8-11, *FBIS-WEU*, June 15, 1989, pp. 28-30.

16. *Washington Post*, August 29, 1989, p. A17. *Turkish Daily News*, November 10, 1989.

17. *International Herald Tribune*, July 13, 1989, p. 8.

number of refugees was problematic for the Turkish authorities; Turkish government passed a decree which allowed the refugees to be immediately accepted as Turkish citizens without waiting period. Turkish side also offered substantial material help to the refugees in the form of employment and housing¹⁸.

Turkish government called upon Bulgaria to enter into negotiations for a comprehensive immigration agreement that safeguarded the property rights of those who choose to leave Bulgaria¹⁹ and the restoration of the rights and the status of the minority²⁰. Bulgaria refused to enter into negotiations and Turkey called for sanctions against Bulgaria²¹. Turkish imports from Bulgaria reduced from 200 million dollars to 40 million. Turkey also raised the issue at various international fora including the United Nations General Assembly, The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) and The Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)²².

Despite a lack of real sanctions against Sofia, Bulgaria suffered from its policy in the international arena and was in danger of becoming isolated. In the international organizations she was constantly forced to defend herself. The withdrawal of the American Ambassador, which interrupted the process of the reconciliation between two countries and the postponement of the European Community talks, were signs of the severe foreign political damage caused by the forced emigration. Even the eastern partners became reluctant to support Sofia in this particular affair. The fact that even the Soviet Union remained neutral in Sofia's struggle with Ankara, trying to bring both opponents to the negotiation table, can be seen as an indirect criticism of the Bulgarian policy²³.

The Turkish-Bulgarian Relations During the 1990s

Political and Security Challenges for Bulgaria in the New Period

Bulgaria after the collapse of the Eastern European military and

18. H. Poulton, *The Balkans*, pp. 158-159.

19. *FBIS-WEU*, June 16, 1989, pp. 41-42, July 7, 1989, p. 24.

20. *FBIS-WEU*, July 6, 1989, pp. 25-26.

21. *FBIS-WEU*, July 16, 1989, p. 34.

22. *FBIS-WEU*, June 6, 1989, p. 29, July 10, 1989, p. 27, July 12, 1989, p. 13.

23. W. Hopken, "Bulgarian-Turkish relations", pp. 82-83.

economic structures lost her allies, her protective Soviet umbrella and all the guarantees to her security. The effects for Bulgaria were tremendous since no other Eastern European country relied to such a great degree upon Soviet structures for both security and trade²⁴.

The emergence of a security vacuum urged Bulgaria to revise her foreign policy and security policy towards the western structures as the unique reliable guarantor for her security and to seek for regional stability with Turkey. One of the essential aims of the post-Cold War Bulgarian foreign policy was to normalize her relations with Turkey. The new Bulgarian leadership, appeared, to feel confident that cooperation with Turkey could work to the advantage of Bulgaria. It would have reduced a serious threat against the country, as 70% of Turkey's tanks and 55% of its artillery were concentrated close to the common border²⁵. A repetition of the 1989 forced exodus of Bulgaria's ethnic Turks could cause a more energetic Turkish intervention for the protection of the minority. Sofia's sense of isolation was such that it feared that a conflict with Turkey would end up with dire and irreversible consequences²⁶. Therefore, improved relations and the lifting of pressure from the minority could contribute to obtain economic assistance from Ankara. Furthermore, the respect for human rights together with cooperation with Turkey could open the way for western support and participation in the European institutions.

In the international level, Bulgaria was obliged to follow a western policy for the following reasons: Bulgarian security problem worsen more after the implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). The CFE Treaty of 1990 did not improve the defense ability of the country because it gave more weight in the quantitative balance and not in the qualitative one in the armed forces and armaments among the Balkan states²⁷. Bulgaria maintained

24. Ekaterina Nikova, "Changing Bulgaria in the changing Balkans", in Güray Göksu, Özdoğan-Kemali Saybasili, eds., *Balkans A mirror of the new International order*, Eren, Istanbul 1995, pp. 189-192.

25. President Zhelev had stated that his country's security depended on "good relations with its neighbors". *FBIS-WEU*, May 14 1992, p. 38.

26. *Turkish Daily News*, October 29, 1996.

27. Nesho Neshev, "Bulgaria's National Security, the Balkans and NATO", *Bulgarian Military Review*, 4/2, summer 1996, p. 52.

quantitative balance in the armaments with Greece and Turkey, but not qualitative because the last two states as NATO members could renew their armaments from other NATO states.

Another reason pursued a western oriented policy were the economic conditions emerged after the end of the Cold War. For the former socialist states and for Bulgaria as well the transition from a centrally planned economy towards the market economy was a terrible experience. It was accompanied with the collapse of the internal market, serious structural problems in production, increasing internal and external debt due to serious macro-economic imbalances and the interruption of the traditional trade relations with CMEA countries and the USSR²⁸. The negative consequences for the Bulgarian economy were enhanced from external factors, like the Gulf war and the UN embargo on Yugoslavia.

The Gulf war and the embargo imposed on Iraq hit the Bulgarian economy because Bulgaria exported significant part of its products to this country and imported significant quantity of oil. Bulgaria also lost a lot from the embargo on Yugoslavia and was isolated commercially from Western Europe in a period when she intended to develop closer economic relations with the Western European states²⁹.

The main objective of Bulgaria's security and economy policies was the creation of links with the main political and economic European institutions³⁰. Furthermore, cooperation with economic organizations, like the IMF and World Bank was essential because Bulgaria expected financial assistance for the recovering of its economy³¹.

The integration into the European Union is a structural defining route in the Bulgarian foreign policy. It will stabilize the country's international position and enhance opportunities for the realization of Bulgaria's national interests. In March 1993 Bulgaria signed the associa-

28. St. Statlev, "Bulgarian Economic Transition", in Ch. Tsardanidis - L. Maroudas, eds., *Greek-Bulgarian Relations. Contemporary Economic and Political Dimensions*, Athens 1995, p. 81 (in Greek).

29. Oscar W. Ciyatt, "Bulgaria's turn Toward Europe", *European Security*, 2/1, Spring 1993, pp. 93-95.

30. Plamen Bonchev, "Bulgaria and the new European Security Architecture", *Bulgarian Military Review*, 3/3, Fall 1995, p. 18.

31. The Bulgarian government tried to implement the reform programs of the IMF and World Bank. Thus the IMF extended a 503 million dollar loan and accepted Bulgaria for full membership.

tion agreement with the European Union (EU), effective since February 1st 1995³². In December 1997 Bulgaria was accepted to participate in the accession process in the EU. She was included in the second group of countries along with Romania, Slovakia, Latvia and Lithuania, which would have to wait longer, but would benefit from closer economic ties through “accession partnerships”³³. With a clear prospect of accession to the EU, Bulgaria attaches major importance to her participation as associate partner in the activity of the Western European Union (WEU), which has been itself the defense component of the European integration. In April 1997 Bulgaria signed a security agreement with WEU. The agreement regulates the terms and standards of exchange and protection of confidential information between two sides³⁴.

Along with her efforts to join the EU and the WEU Bulgaria gives great importance in her relations with NATO. Bulgarian leadership recognized the alliance as the main player in the post-1989 European security environment, and as the sole and sufficient guarantor of Bulgaria’s security. Sofia supported the enlargement of NATO and in December 1991 joined the North-Atlantic Co-operation Council (NACC).

Furthermore, Bulgaria was among the first states adopted the idea about the “Partnership for Peace”. On 14 February 1994, President Zhelu Zhelev signed the “Partnership for Peace” program on behalf of Bulgaria. In a speech on that occasion, Zhelev hailed the scheme as “a momentous process that will help democracy strike strong roots in Eastern Europe”. On a more specific issue, he stressed that the move was in no way directed against Russian interests. “On the contrary” he said, “we support Russia’s democratic and reformist forces and wish them success. Moreover, we are convinced that NATO is in a position to find appropriate ways to make Russia more committed to European security”³⁵.

32. P. Bonchev, “Bulgaria and the new European Security” 19-20. Especially the economic dimension, Kyriakos Kentrotis, “Η Βουλγαρία στο κλείσιμο του αιώνα: Επιλογές και προοπτικές της εξωτερικής και της αμυντικής της πολιτικής”, *Βαλκανικά Σύμμεικτα* 9 (1997) 234-237.

33. Haluk Kabaalioglu, “Turkey and the EU, Converging or Drafting Apart?”, *Marmara Journal of European Studies*, 7/1-2, Istanbul 1999, p. 134.

34. SWB. *BBC Monitoring, Balkans and Eastern Europe*, April 9, 1997, p. 4.

35. Kjell Engelbrekt, “Southeast European States Seek Equal Treatment”, *RFE/RL Research Report*, 3/12, March 25, 1994, p. 34.

Although Zhelev was one of the most consistent supporters of NATO in the region, carefully worded his speech understanding Moscow's sensitivity regarding the "Partnership for Peace" program. This initiative envisaged defense cooperation through the conclusion of a bilateral defense agreement with NATO but does not offer a clear-out security guarantee³⁶.

President Zhelev and the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which came to power in 1991, promoted the thesis of the immediate accession in NATO. Since January 1995 after the rise of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) to power the Bulgarian attitude towards NATO changed. The BSP purports that the country must not rush to present her candidacy. Rather she should wait for NATO's future development and transformation, and for greater clarity about the future of "Partnership for Peace" program and NATO's attitude to Russia³⁷.

The unstable Bulgarian position, along with the NATO leadership's reluctance to undertake commitments in Bulgaria's security because of the transitional situation of the country and the remaining tension in the area led NATO to exclude Bulgaria from the first NATO enlargement which took place in July 1997.

Turkish Foreign Policy in the post-Cold War Era

For Turkey the end of the Cold War brought two important changes in her strategic environment. On the one hand, the collapse of the Soviet Union has reduced the saliency of the Soviet threat. On the other hand as a result of the disintegration of the USSR and Yugoslavia, new opportunities appeared in the Turkish foreign policy to extend her influence in these regions.

In particular, Turkey sought to improve her relations with Bulgaria. Due to no good relations with some neighboring states both in Europe and in Middle East, the rapprochement with Bulgaria would diminish Turkish security concerns in the Balkans. It would also help the improvement of the situation of the Turkish minority and reduce the likelihood of a significant out-migration of Bulgarian Turks to Turkey.

36. Nikolai Milkov, "Partnership for Peace and the Foreign Policy priorities of the Republic of Bulgaria", *Bulgarian Military Review*, 3/3, Fall 1995, p. 32.

37. SWB. *BBC Monitoring, Balkans and Eastern Europe*, December 12, 1996, p. 4.

Since the end of the Ottoman presence in the region Balkans had not witnessed a Turkish involvement. Turkey's participation in bilateral treaties with the Balkan states and attempts at Balkan cooperation was recast under a different setting in the post-war East-West division.

The Ottoman period has always been treated extremely negatively in the Atatürkist vision. Many intellectuals and politicians (among them the late president Özal) have become sympathetic toward a broader re-examination of the Ottoman period. The newer —more revisionist views— do not represent a whole rejection of Atatürk but rather recognition that not every idea and value of Atatürk has to be forever valid in Turkish consideration of the future. The Atatürkist tradition itself is thus undergoing some revisionism, bringing with it a more objective treatment of the past rather than maintenance of an uncritical Atatürkist ideology intact forever³⁸.

A re-examination and revaluation of Ottoman history in no way implies the emergence of a new Turkish irredentism or expansionism. It does suggest, however, a renewed interest in the former territories and people of the empire, which includes Muslims who were part of that empire. It suggests that certain organic, geopolitical, cultural and economic relations that had been absent during the period of Cold War polarization may remerge in the new regional environment.

The dramatic events in the Balkans after 1990 pulled the Turkish interest. Turkey belongs to the Balkan peninsula geographically, historically and culturally. This sense of belonging to the Balkan complex allows Turkey to recognize its legitimate interests and concern, especially during times of change in the region. The Balkans are a strategic link between Turkey and the western Europe and a major factor in the range of political, economic, security and cultural bonds that Turkey has formed with the outside world³⁹.

By middle 1991, Yugoslavia was disintegrating to civil war. Turkey originally adopted a conservative position on the simmering Yugoslav

38. Graham Fuller, "Turkey's new Eastern orientation", in G. Fuller, and I. Lesser, eds., *Turkey's new Geopolitics. From the Balkans to western China*, Westview Press 1993, pp. 47-50.

39. Duygu Sezer, "Turkey in the new security environment in the Balkan and Black Sea region", in V. Matny, and C. Nation, eds., *Turkey between the East and West. New Challenges for a Rising Regional Power*, Westview Press 1991, p. 81.

crisis, hoping that the Yugoslav federation could be maintained through internal negotiations and compromise. Turkey chose the policy that was closer to the west and secured the regional stability. Turkey wanted to appear as a part of the solution and not as a part of the Balkan problem.

Once disintegration ensued and the Bosnian Muslim population of the internationally recognized Republic of Bosnia-Herzegovina was in difficult position, Turkey's attitude changed. New policies were designed to serve three immediate objectives: to end the bloodshed in Bosnia-Herzegovina, to preserve the republic's independence and territorial integrity. Turkish policy has essentially sought to contain the Serbian aggression. On 7 August 1992, Turkey elaborated the details of an Action Plan to be implemented by the United Nations Security Council. In April 1993, she joined the NATO operation for enforcement of the seven-month old no-fly zone over Bosnia-Herzegovina. Turkey also sent 2700 peace-keeping troops in total to serve in UNPROFOR in late June 1994⁴⁰. During the Kosovo crisis, Turkey supported and took part actively in the intensive NATO air campaign against Serbia as a means to urge Serbia to withdraw from Kosovo⁴¹.

Since the end of the Cold War, Turkey looked to the Balkans for three more reasons: a. Common security concerns. After the dissolution of Warsaw Pact the former communist Balkan states sought to engage with the western institutions. Turkey is a member of NATO, close related with European Union, and associated member of Western European Union. Turkey can provide help to these countries to join these institutions. b. Balkan as a passage. Over two million Turks have settled down in Central and Western European countries. Every year they visit their country and most of them prefer to travel by road and pass through the Balkans. Also the major part of Turkish trade is with Western Europe, and again the largest portion of Turkey's exports and imports to and from European states passes from Balkan. Almost all Balkan countries are engaged in the transit trade between Europe and Middle East. c. Need for economic cooperation. In the past the Balkan states being under a different economic system the chances for economic

40. *Briefing*, August 22, 1994, p. 11.

41. Hasan Unal, "Turkey, emerging regional power, and the Balkans in the 1990s", *Economic Dialogue Turkey*, 2000, p. 105.

cooperation were few.

An important initiative, inspired by Turgut Özal, known as the Black Sea Co-operation Region Project has been a first attempt for a closer co-operation. The project was designed to promote private sector activity and stimulate the free movement of goods and services among the member states. In addition to Turkey the group also includes Bulgaria, Romania, Greece and Albania, as well as six member states of the former Soviet Union- Ukraine Russia, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Moldova and Georgia⁴².

Despite its initial success in establishing an organizational structure, the BSEC's future is not yet assured. The structure of BSEC lacks the mechanisms needed to implement and enforce its directives. The BSEC has not yet undertaken concrete measures to foster economic growth and free enterprises in the Black Sea region.

The Post-Zhivkov Era and the first steps towards the Rehabilitation of the Turkish-Bulgarian Relations

On 10 November 1989 Todor Zhivkov was ousted as Bulgarian leader and replaced by his Foreign Affairs Minister Petar Mladenov. Zhivkov had been looking increasingly out of step with Gorbachev's policies in USSR and with the events in Eastern Europe. The general decay of the country's political and economic situation and its leader itself, forced Mladenov and his supporters to step in from above to prevent a revolution from below. Insofar as the Turkish question had contributed to the country's loss of credibility it doubtless also led to the change of the 10th of November.

The problem of the Turkish minority has continued to be a very sensitive issue for the new leadership as well. It was not easy for them to carry out a fundamental change because they had also supported and partly even carried out the measures against the Turkish population. However, fundamental changes were absolutely necessary to regain any credibility for the claim of democratization. Furthermore, it was es-

42. Stephen Larrabee, "Balkan Security after the Cold War: New Dimensions, New Challenges", Stephen Larrabee, ed., *The volatile Powder Keg. Balkan Security after the Cold War*, American University Press 1994, p. 24.

sential for the new Bulgarian leadership to show a new “image” in the international community and especially in organizations like the Council of Europe that Bulgaria applied for membership.

As a result there was a relaxation in the repression policy and Turks who in cases had been sent to other parts of the country under the People’s Militia Law were allowed freedom of movement and could return to their home territories. Article 273 of the criminal code that was used to penalize those who criticized government policy was abolished. Those sentenced under it, including ethnic Turks, were released. Further, ethnic Turks were released in December when another amnesty was announced for those sentenced under Articles 108 and 109 dealing with anti-state agitation and propaganda and forming anti-state groups, respectively⁴³. In the end of December 1989, under protests’ pressure the government announced that those who had their names forcibly changed could use their original names again, practice Islam and speak Turkish in their everyday lives⁴⁴.

From the beginning of 1990 a number of measures were officially introduced to restore the rights of the minority. In early March 1990 the National Assembly met to discuss laws on the restoration of Muslim names. On 5 March the National Assembly unanimously passed the Bulgarian Citizens Names Law⁴⁵. Alongside with the restoration of the names, the opening of all mosques and freedom of religious practices were initiated. In the end of April 1990, the first publication in the Turkish language started. Agreement had also been reached about a new law on education stipulating four classes a week study of Turkish in the school curriculum for areas where ethnic Turks were living in compact masses⁴⁶.

The abolishment of the serious restrictions in the rights of the Turkish minority satisfied Turkey and high-level bilateral contacts started between the two states. The first was a meeting between Bulgaria’s Deputy Prime Minister Georgi Yordanov and Turkish Foreign Minister Mesut Yilmaz on 30 November 1989. Next, in January 1990 came a meeting in Kuwait between the Foreign Ministers Mesut Yilmaz

43. H. Poulton, *The Balkans*, p. 163.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

45. *Turkish Daily News*, March 6, 1990.

46. H. Poulton, *The Balkans*, p. 170.

and Boiko Dimitrov⁴⁷. In this occasion the Bulgarian Foreign Minister stated, “we want to turn a page between Bulgaria and Turkey” and suggested a joint declaration on human rights to overcome the years of annoyance over the treatment of the Bulgarian Turks. The Turkish side welcomed Bulgaria’s decision to restore Turkish minority’s rights and the Turkish Foreign Minister responded “for the first time the two countries used a common language” and added that “after the new decisions of Bulgaria, a new era in the bilateral relations would begin”⁴⁸.

Political Cooperation between Bulgaria and Turkey

The victory of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) —main opponent of the Socialist party— in the elections of October 1991 and the participation in the coalition government of the Turkish minority party Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF)⁴⁹ created a wider space for the improvement of the bilateral relations.

During 1991 the Bulgarian President Zhelyu Zhelev and his Turkish President Turgut Ozal met twice in Amsterdam and New York. The main subject of the talks was the participation of Sofia in Ankara’s initiative for the “Black Sea Economic Cooperation”⁵⁰. Bulgaria accepted the proposal and President Zhelev attended the signing ceremony during the Black Sea summit in June 1992. Sofia saw its participation in the initiative as a chance to improve further the political and economic relations with Ankara.

In April 1992 Turkish Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin visited Sofia and signed an agreement with Bulgaria eliminated the restrictions experienced during diplomatic visits. According to the agreement, visas for diplomats and public officials have been waived, and businessmen will have to acquire visas only once a year. The two sides also agreed to establish two committees to resolve certain technical matters between

47. *FBIS-WEU*, January 17, 1990, p. 29.

48. Duncan Perry, “New Directions for Bulgarian-Turkish Relations”, *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1/41, October 16, 1992, p. 36.

49. The Bulgaria’s ethnic Turks reacting against the assimilationalist repression suffered in the late 1980s, founded the MRF. The party was formed by Ahmend Dogan on his release from prison in December 1989.

50. *FBIS-WEU*, April 10, 1991, p. 1.

the two countries. These matters were the adoption of the Rezve river as the border between two countries, the territorial waters and the situation of the fishermen in the Black Sea, the FIR line, and the border demarcation stones in Meric⁵¹. Çetin's visit showed that the two sides have reached a point of comprehensive understanding and good will in resolving their problems.

The following month the Bulgarian Prime Minister Fillip Dimitrov officially visited Ankara. The Bulgarian Prime Minister had talks with the Turkish Prime Minister Suleyman Demirel, the Deputy Prime Minister Erdal İnönü and the Foreign Minister Hikmet Çetin. During these official talks, the Turkish side recalled that there was an unfortunate period in the relations from 1984 to 1989 when the rights of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria were violated. As this period ended, with the democratization movement the two states could improve their political and economic relations that were considered important in the face of the developments in the Balkans. The Bulgarian side stated that the new government would respect the human rights of the minority and added that the traces remaining from the period of oppression would be removed shortly⁵². At the end of the official talks a Friendship, Good-neighborliness and Cooperation agreement was signed by Prime Ministers Demirel and Dimitrov⁵³. The agreement provided for expanded ties, emphasizing confidence-building measures and a procedure for crisis management.

It is worth noting that in two years time Bulgarian-Turkish relations had made a rapid improvement. Turkey was considering Bulgaria as a reliable partner and expressed its support towards Bulgaria's admission to NATO. In return for her support, Turkey asked from Bulgaria the prohibition of PKK activities in the country. The agreement on cooperation against Terrorism, Drug Trafficking and Organized Crime in February 1993 showed the will of both sides to cooperate in this field⁵⁴.

The dialogue between the two countries continued when the Bulgarian President Zhelev went on an official two-day visit in Ankara (6-9 July 1994). A series of confidential talks took place concerning bilateral

51. *FBIS-WEU*, April 1, 1992, pp. 36-37, April 10, 1991, p. 1.

52. *FBIS-WEU*, May 6, 1992, p. 42.

53. *Hürriyet*, May 6, 1992, p. 21.

54. *Reuters*, February, 6, 1993.

and regional issues. The Yugoslav problem was discussed as both sides held different positions in the conflict. Bulgaria believed that no Balkan state should get involved in this dispute anyway, in contrast to Turkey that supported the active involvement of third countries under the UN auspices⁵⁵.

The two sides signed four agreements concerning: the encouragement and mutual protection of investments, economic cooperation, livestock and vegetable product trade, and double taxation avoidance⁵⁶. The Bulgarian President's visit was seen as symbolizing the great improvement in relations since the days of 1989 and a demonstration of how vital cooperation was between the two states.

In January 1995 the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) came to power. BSP did not differentiate the targets of the Bulgarian foreign policy as was designed by the previous UDF governments. However, the new Socialist government appeared to be more skeptical towards the West and more favourable towards Greece than towards Turkey. The Socialist government also did not show the same will as the UDF, towards the restoration of the rights of the Turkish minority⁵⁷.

The attitude of the Socialist government towards the ethnic Turks caused the concern of Ankara but the bilateral high-level contacts continued as Ankara wanted to maintain the good relations initiated in 1991.

Turkish Foreign Minister Erdal İnönü paid an official two-day visit in Sofia in June 1995. İnönü's trip was the first high-level diplomatic visit between the two countries since the socialist government came to power.

İnönü and his Bulgarian counterpart Georgy Pirinski announced at

55. *Briefing*, 997, July 11, 1994, p. 9.

56. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

57. Mainly for political reasons, the Turkish minority party — Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF) had allied itself with the UDF since 1991. As a result the BSP became increasingly anti-Turkish. In October 1991 parliamentary elections an alliance was formed with a few small, ultranationalist parties that had a strictly anti-Turkish foundation. Following the elections, the BSP challenged the legitimacy of the MRF's deputies, charging that the MRF was a party "founded on a religious or ethnic basis" and thus was in violation of article 14 of the Constitution. The Constitutional Court narrowly rejected the BSP's claim but this issue created high political tension. See John Bell, "Bulgaria", in St. White - J. Batt - P. Lewis, eds., *Developments in East European Politics*, Macmillan 1993, pp. 96-97.

the end of the talks that the two states would set up committees to work on solutions to pending problems regarding sovereignty rights in the Black Sea and property claims by both governments in each other's territory. The bilateral Black Sea problems include a border dispute and disagreements on flight routes and fishing rights⁵⁸.

Difference between the two sides emerged on the functioning of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (BSEC) process. Bulgaria supported that the BSEC should be kept as an economic organization without political institutions as Sofia sees European Union membership as an ultimate goal and in any way does not want to jeopardize her chances of gaining entry to the European Union. Thus, Bulgaria is not represented in the BSEC's parliamentary assembly⁵⁹.

Furthermore, during the Turkish Foreign Minister's visit, the details of the visit of the Turkish President Suleyman Demirel in Sofia was discussed. The visit of the Turkish Head of State was set on July 4-6, 1995. President Demirel held talks with President Zhelev and Prime Minister Videnov. He also visited the Bulgarian Parliament where he met delegates of various parliamentary groups. In his speech in the Bulgarian parliament Demirel gave his message saying that Turkey wanted nothing more than to see ethnic Turks enjoying the same rights and privileges as Bulgarians and praised Bulgaria for respecting the rights of the ethnic Turks since 1989⁶⁰.

The rise to power of UDF in April 1997 did not bring substantial changes in the Turkish-Bulgarian relations. Both states showed the same desire to stabilize further their good relations. The newly elected Bulgarian President —under the UDF— Petar Stoyanov visited Turkey in July 1997. Bulgarian President asked for the Turkish assistance for Bulgaria's removal from the list of countries that did not treat Muslims in a good way⁶¹. Ankara complied with this request. In December of the same year, Turkey approached OIC, asking formally to disregard its

58. *Bulgarian Telegraph Agency*, June 28, 1995, p. 2.

59. *Turkish Daily News*, July 1, 1995.

60. *Turkish Daily News*, July 6, 1995.

61. *Reuters*, 1 August 1997. Bulgaria wished to have closer cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries, as it was seen in Stoyanov's visit to Kuwait in June 1997. Ron Synovitz, "Stoyanov Seeks Better Relations With Muslim, Arab States", *RFE/RL*, 19 June 1997.

criticism of Bulgarian assimilation campaign in the 1980s⁶².

In December 1997 Turkish Prime Minister Mesut Yilmaz paid an official visit to Bulgaria. During this visit a border dispute lasting for 50 years in the delta of the Rezve river, which flows into the Black Sea, was resolved. Furthermore, both sides agreed to form a working group that would deal with problems of separated families and work to eliminate visa problems⁶³. Turkish Prime Minister Yilmaz offered Turkey's services as Bulgaria's intermediary in commercial contacts with Central Asian and Caucasus countries. Kostov expressed his hope that Turkey would become "Bulgaria's gate" into the Islamic and Arab world⁶⁴. According to the Turkish Prime Minister there were no existing problems between Bulgaria and Turkey. It was in this period that Bulgaria signed the framework Agreement of the Council of Europe for the Protection of National Minorities. That assured Turkey about Bulgaria's goodwill to continue to respect the rights of the Turkish minority. Kostov's visit to Turkey in November 1998 was good news for the Bulgarian Turks who had immigrated to Turkey. The two parties signed an agreement, according to which the emigrants would receive their pensions in Turkey.

Military Cooperation

Turkish-Bulgarian cooperation improved substantially in the military field. Military exchanges —virtually non-existent prior to 1991— became frequent. Discussions of bilateral military concerns started with a visit to Bulgaria by a Turkish Army inspection team in July 1990. Shortly thereafter the Chief of the Bulgarian General Staff, Lieutenant General Radnyu Minchev, went to Turkey to pay the first such visit since the advent of communism in Bulgaria. The December of the same year, a confidence-building agreement was signed, and in May 1991 Turkish officers visited troops and installations in Harmanli, Bulgaria.

In December 1991 an important Document was signed, designed to strengthen security and confidence along the Turkish-Bulgarian border. The two sides agreed to give each other advance notice of major military

62. *Reuters*, 2 December, 1997.

63. *Reuters*, 6 December, 1997.

64. *Reuters*, 5-6 December, 1997.

activities taking place within sixty kilometers of their common border. The pact also called for an increase in military contacts as well as a number of concrete confidence-building measures, such as prior notification of maneuvers and inspections beyond those contained in the Paris CFE agreement⁶⁵. Since then, both sides have reduced their military strength near the border under an agreement reached in Ankara in July 1992 between the Bulgarian Chief of General Staff Lieutenant General Lyuben Petrov and the Turkish Chief of General Staff Dogan Gures⁶⁶. In that occasion Gures noted: "We have smashed the steel chains between Turkey and Bulgaria. The rest is easy"⁶⁷.

In November 1992 one more important agreement was signed between the General Staff of the two countries. According to the agreement, the two sides would work for the maintenance and the close examination of the confidence-building measures⁶⁸.

These Documents were followed by an agreement for cooperation in military training and technology⁶⁹. The agreement was signed between the Turkish National Defense Minister Nevzat Ayaz and his Bulgarian counterpart Valentin Aleksandrov, during the visit of Turkish Defense Minister in Sofia in March 1993⁷⁰.

The high-level military contacts between the two states continued with the visits of the Bulgarian Chief of General Staff Tsvetan Totomirov in Ankara in July 1995⁷¹ and the visit of the Turkish Chief of General Staff Ismail Hakki Karadayi in Sofia in July 1996⁷². During these meetings the two parts confirmed the good relations in defense and mili-

65. Duncan Perry, "Bulgaria: Security Concerns and Foreign Policy Considerations", in Larabee St. ed., *The volatile Powder keg. Balkan Security after the Cold War*, American University Press 1994, p. 60.

66. *FBIS-WEU*, July 6, 1992, p. 26.

67. Duncan Perry, "New Directions for the Turkish-Bulgarian Relations", *RFE/RL Research Report*, 1/41, October 16, 1992, p. 37.

68. Duncan Perry, "Bulgaria: Security concerns and foreign policy considerations", in Larabee St. ed., *The volatile Powder Keg. Balkan Security after the Cold War*, American University Press, p. 61.

69. *FBIS-WEU*, March 10, 1993, p. 57.

70. Kyriakos Kentrotis, "Αναζητούμενες ισορροπίες στα Βαλκάνια: Η Βουλγαρία ανάμεσα στην Ελλάδα και την Τουρκία", Yialuridis and Tsakonas eds., *Ελλάδα και Τουρκία μετά το τέλος του Ψυχρού Πολέμου*, Athens 1999, p. 264.

71. *FBIS-WEU*, July 14, 1995, p. 28.

72. *FBIS-WEU*, July 3, 1996.

tary fields, discussed about the security problems in the region and the joint participation of Bulgarian and Turkish units in the Partnership for Peace⁷³.

At the same time, Bulgaria tried to create the same military establishments with Greece in the framework of "balanced relations" with Athens and Ankara. Bulgaria signed similar-to Turkish-Bulgarian-military agreement with Greece in November 1993. Moreover, Bulgarian President Zhelu Zhelev proposed establishing a mechanism for a three-way dialogue among Sofia-Ankara-Athens in a bid to help establish stability and security in the region⁷⁴. Greece did not give more importance because a few months earlier a Greek proposal on the demilitarization of Thrace was rejected from Turkey, evidently because the draft did not address the issue of the Greek troops on Aegean islands.

Conclusion

In the last years Turkey and Bulgaria were fairly successful in developing good relations. Major steps towards the Turkish-Bulgarian rapprochement were the gradual improvement of the status of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria and the two sides' mutual understanding of their national interests in the Balkans in the end of the Cold War. Bulgaria was seeking for security guarantees in the regional level that took place with the military agreements with Turkey. Turkey for her part was seeking to reinforce her relations with the former communist Balkan states- and in particular with Bulgaria. The cooperation between the two countries was based also on the similarity of their foreign policy priorities, as they both pursue full integration into the European structures as an inseparable part of Europe. The two states have stabilized their relations through several high-level contacts and agreements and managed to establish a mechanism of constant dialogue.

73. *Bulgarian Military Review*, 4/3-4, Winter 1995, p. 85.

74. *FBIS-WEU*, November 15, 1991, p. 41.